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ABSTRACT

Doll play activities were used to measure attitude change in 270 black, Mexican American, and white students who participated in a multicultural awareness project. The children, aged second through sixth grade, visited People Place Multicultural Center, where they experienced six different settings simulating the cultures of Africa, China, Germany, India, Mexico, and the United States. A control group of 90 children participated in neutral activities. Attitude change was measured by pre- and post testing with three six-inch dolls representing a black, a Mexican American, and a white child. The child was directed to choose one doll representing himself or herself, and to place the other two dolls somewhere in the same area. Proximity of the other dolls to the one representing the student was the dependent variable. Positive attitude change was indicated when the proximity of the dolls increased from pretest to post test. Data were analyzed by analysis of variance of three factors: grade level; ethnic or racial group; and exposure to People Place. Results indicated that the People Place experience led to a favorable attitude change toward children of other cultures, at least on a short-term basis. (GDC)

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EVALUATING ATTITUDINAL CHANGE IN A MULTICULTURAL SETTING

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Evaluating Attitudinal Change in a Multicultural Setting

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study was the evaluation of attitudinal change in a multicultural project. Essentially, the People Place Multicultural Center, operating within a district utilizing a magnet school concept to meet desegregation guidelines, involves students from predominantly one-race schools in a variety of cultural interactions. Some of the major objectives of the Center include reduction of group isolation, fostering cultural awareness, and increasing interracial understanding. Evaluation of attitude change in children was accomplished through the use of doll play simulation. Results indicated a more positive attitude towards ethnically different children by those participating in the People Place experience.

EVALUATING ATTITUDINAL CHANGE IN A MULTICULTURAL SETTING

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The principal objective of this paper is to detail the evaluation of a unique multicultural education project, particularly with respect to the capacity of that project to create a change in the way children of different cultures view each other. The project is People Place Multicultural Center and it was established in Houston, Texas, in 1973 with a grant from the Emergency School Assistance Act (ESAA). Project support in subsequent years continued to come from ESSA, however, the local school district assumed progressively more of the operating costs. Prior to elaborating on the specific features of this evaluation, a description of the project and its operation will be provided.

People Place Multicultural Center consists of six elementary school classrooms which were redesigned to simulate, as closely as possible, six actual cultural settings. The cultures represented by these settings include Africa, China, Germany, India, Mexico, and the United States. These cultures are presented through oral instruction and by active involvement of the students in the geography,attire, art, music, dance, lifestyle, language, food, games and crafts of the people in those cultures.

Each cultural setting at People Place provides a competent instructor who is either a native of the culture he is representing or a descendant from the culture who has done extensive research in that area. The instructor, attired in native dress, introduces the students to the cultural setting where they hear music, play games, sample foods, try on clothes, and see currency, art, maps, flags, artifacts, and replicas of homes, all native to the culture they are visiting. Students also view models of finished craftwork and, under the direction of the instructor, learn how to make their own craft. In the setting representing the United States, children meet at the beginning and at the end to get acquainted and share experiences.

Since its inception, People Place has served equal numbers of black, Mexican-American, and white students. For this reason, the Houston school district has included it as an Alternative Cluster Center in its Magnet School Plan. Magnet school programs represent the district's current desegregation plan and was recently approved by the federal courts as a substitute for the paired-school plan. Forty-eight specially designed magnet school programs reach approximately 65,000 students of different ethnic backgrounds. Within this context, then, People Place Multicultural Center attempts to provide many of these students with experiences designed to increase mutual respect and promote interracial understanding.

The objectives which became the focal point of this evaluation were that the People Place experience would: 1. Reduce racial isolation, and 2. Foster cultural awareness and promote interracial acceptance. So, essentially, following a visit to People Place Multicultural Center, a child should experience a change in attitude towards children who are racially or culturally different.

The problem of evaluation of such a change is centered in the general

problem of evaluating attitudinal change, and, the more specific problem of evaluating attitudinal change in young children. Research by Piaget (1951), Mussen(1960), and Walls (1973) delineates at least four potential distractors involved in the measuring of attitudes in young children:

1. A narrow experience range exists, thereby connecting idiosyncratic meanings to certain phenomena.
2. The concrete-oriented child may have difficulty with the abstractions of attitude formation.
3. The distinctions between reality and fantasy are not clearly established.
4. Language and expression skills are just beginning to develop.

Acknowledging the difficulties associated with measuring children's attitudes, Erikson (1958), Sears (1947), and Walls (1973) found it beneficial to make use of the third mentioned distractor as a framework for developing a vehicle for assessment. All used doll play activities and found them to be a viable projective technique in the study of attitudes in young children. The rationale behind the use of doll play activities is that the distinctions between reality and fantasy are not clearly established in young children; therefore, what they do with dolls represents the reality of the world as they perceive it. Over the years, the use of doll play in the assessment of attitudes has proven to be one of the more reliable indices of children's attitudes. For these reasons, a doll play methodology was selected for assessing attitudinal change in children as a result of the People Place experience.

Samples and Procedures

Two hundred and seventy black, Mexican-American, and white students,

grades 2 through 5, were randomly selected to visit People Place Multicultural Center. Additional groups of students, proportionate with respect to ethnicity and grade level, attended school functions of similar length to the People Place visit, but containing no culturally related information or experiences. There were 90 such additional students and these made up the control group. The total sample, then, consisted of 360 students.

Prior to and following their respective experiences the attitudes of all the students toward racially different children were assessed using a doll play proximity measure. This measure consisted of three dolls approximately six inches in height; one doll represented a black child, one a Mexican-American child, and another a white child. The actual physical color of the doll was a key discriminator so special measures were taken to ensure that the students were able to discriminate the cultural group represented by each doll before administration of the measure.

Upon arrival at People Place, each student to be assessed was taken to a separate room and asked to participate in a special game. The first step involved familiarizing the student with the dolls and a mock classroom, proportionate in size to the dolls, which had been built for this evaluation. The student was then told to imagine that one of the dolls represented himself. He was asked to pick up this doll and place it somewhere in the (mock) classroom. He was told that he was to wait in this classroom until the People Place teacher arrived; however, the other two children (dolls) had to wait in this classroom also, and he was directed to pick these up and place them somewhere in the classroom to wait for the teacher with him. Each student was given the liberty to place them anywhere he wished in the classroom. The precise location of each doll was marked on a sheet of paper which had been placed

on the floor of the mock classroom. The total distance between the dolls became the pretest score for the child.

The same procedure was repeated for each student following either the People Place experience or the neutral school function. However, the students were told they had to wait for the bus driver to take them back to school rather than wait for the teacher in the mock classroom. The location of placement of the dolls was marked on a second piece of paper. The total distance between the dolls served here as a post test score.

In this study, proximity was the dependent variable. Operationally, proximiy was defined as a measure of overall distance between the doll before and after the People Place experience or the neutral school function. The difference between the pretest proximity score and the post test proximity score constituted a measure of the change in proximity. It was hypothesized that the students who received the People Place experience would place the dolls significantly closer together in the post test measure (and therefore have a greater, positive change score) than would the students in the control group. Confirmation of the hypothesis would mean that the People Place experience had the capacity to bring about greater interracial acceptance.

The validation process used for the instrumentation of this evaluation followed procedures developed by the Center for the Study of Evaluation and the Early Childhood Research Center at the University of California, Los Angeles. Their system, using the acronym, MEAN, reflects four areas that demand attention for effective instrumentation:

Measurement Valididty

The major concern here was the ability of the instrument to measure the specific changes in attitude which it was intended to measure. Follow-up

interviews of the students used in field testing revealed that their placement of the dolls in various positions relative to each other reflected their degree of acceptance of the other cultures.

Examinee Appropriateness

One of the most difficult tasks with younger children is finding appropriate stimuli, content, and instructions for the instrumentation process. Consideration must be given to test format, timing, and quality of illustrations. The doll play proximity measure was carefully field tested on a sample similar to the actual subjects to determine length of time required, ease of understanding, and quality of the play. The quality issue was crucial because it was essential that the examinee identify culturally and/or racially with one of the dolls. Indeed, field testing revealed that a few minutes for each child to handle the dolls allowed a sufficient degree of identification. The procedure, for most of the students, was found to be quite interesting and certainly appropriate for the age levels involved.

Administrative Usability

Usability here refers to ease and appropriateness of administration and scoring. During field testing of the People Place instrument, all administrators received enough practice to establish a standard set of procedures and to eliminate any conditions that would create discomfort for the student.

Scoring consisted of observation of doll placement by the student, identifying the doll selected as himself, placing a mark on the removable sheet of paper at the base of the mock classroom to correspond to his placement of the dolls, and measuring the total distance between the marks.

Normal Technical Excellence

Consistency of the procedures and accuracy of scoring were given a great

deal of attention in the instrumentation. Of particular importance was the reliability with which the children were able to identify their own culture or race. During field testing, the dolls underwent a variety of changes which reflected the initial inability of the students to differentiate the cultures consistently. With the final doll figures the students consistently identified their own culture, as well as the other two.

Design

Three independent variables, type of instructional experience, grade level, and cultural group membership, were arranged in a 5 x 3 x 2 factorial design. The first variable, grade level, consisted of five levels: second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth grade students. The second variable, cultural group membership, consisted of three levels: black students, Mexican-American students, and white students. The third variable consisted of the People Place experience and the neutral school function. A three-factor analysis of variance design was used to analyze the data (unequal n's).

Results

The analysis of variance which is presented in Table 1 reveals significant effects for type of instructional experience ($F = 47.83$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$), ethnicity ($F = 3.66$; $df = 2$; $p < .05$), and grade level ($F = 2.64$; $df = 4$, $p < .05$). So, the scores of those students who participated in the People Place experience were significantly different from the scores of the students participating in the neutral school function. On the average, these students placed the dolls eight centimeters closer to each other in the post test (greater positive change score), while the control group students placed the doll only .59 of a centimeter closer in the post test.

TABLE 1

Analysis of Variance Summary Table

Source	SS	DF	MS	F
Ethnicity	732.38	2	366.91	3.66*
Grade	1056.49	4	264.13	2.64*
Instructional Experience	4784.87	1	4784.87	47.83*
Ethnicity by Grade	680.78	8	85.04	.85
Ethnicity by Instruction	38.91	2	19.46	.19
Grade by Instruction	1478.66	4	369.66	3.69*
Ethnicity Grade by Instruction	1020.96	8	127.60	1.27
Within	33011.39	330	100.04	

*$p < .05$

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine if involving elementary school students in multicultural instruction would affect their attitudes towards children from other cultures. It was hypothesized that students who participated in the People Place experience would have a greater positive change score on the doll play instrument than would students who participated in a neutral school function. Empirical evaluation of this hypothesis confirmed the expectancy that students participating at People Place would experience a favorable change in their attitudes toward children of other cultures.

The basis for inferring that change has occurred in the attitudes of the students derives from the previously discussed notion that children have a tendency to regard fantasy and reality as synonymous. So if, in directed play, they position the dolls at a particular distance from one another, it is assumed that there is a reason for doing this. Since they are fully conscious of the fact that each doll represents a different child from a particular culture, it is assumed that placing the dolls at specific distances from each other indicates their degree of acceptance of children from these other cultures. The fact that the change scores of students who participated in the People Place experience were significantly greater than the change scores of similar students who did not have this experience appears to be an indication that the People Place experience was responsible for this change.

There are many specific aspects of the People Place experience which may be crucial in creating the positive change in attitudes. However, it is not completely clear which ones are more crucial. Children who visit People Place become aware, very vividly, of the fact that children of all cultures eat,

sing, dance, play games, and have similar school lives. Mover and Engebrecht (1977) state that such an emphasis on similarities across cultures is a necessary component in multicultural education. Furthermore, the students encounter ideas and experiences that are quite closely related to their ideas and experiences. According to Morris (1977) bridging this potential gap is essential to understanding other cultures. The students actively participate in important features of a variety of cultures and are ethnically integrated while participating in these cultures. These two features of the People Place experience seem to combine to make some impact on the attitudes of the children.

The general conclusion of this study is that involving culturally mixed elementary school children in multicultural instruction will result in favorable change in degree of acceptance of one another, at least on a short-term basis.

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